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THE
ELIZABETHAN
DRAMATISTS

EXCEPT SHAKESPEARE

By CHARLES J. SISSON

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THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMATISTS

EXCEPT SHAKESPEARE

By

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PREFACE

AN attempt is here made to link up the Elizabethan drama with the stage and with social history, and to place it in relation with what preceded and what followed it, as far as space permits. Omissions, especially of the academic drama and the masque, are regrettable but inevitable.

C. J. S.

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THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMATISTS

INTRODUCTION

THE Elizabethan drama in England has been celebrated as the most admirable expression, in the history of the world's literature, of the life and national consciousness of a people growing to maturity and taking an important place in the European polity. It has been pointed out that this significant efflorescence of the drama covers a long period, and adorns a full century of English history, roughly from the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 to the close of the reign of Charles I. in 1649 and the establishment of the Puritan Commonwealth, which closed the London theatres and put an abrupt end to the writing and acting of plays. Critics have appreciated the fact that the fundamental characteristics of this long series of dramatic literature were developed during the reign of Elizabeth, that they reflected the spirit of Elizabethan England, and that they were so impressed upon the drama that they persisted throughout the reigns of the two Stuart kings who followed her. The Elizabethan drama is, therefore, an accepted term for the drama under Elizabeth, James I., and Charles I., though the terms Jacobean and Caroline are also used to distinguish

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chronological sections of the whole series, and the term Stuart to denote that written under both these kings.

There is need, indeed, for such terms. While the essential continuity of this drama is rightly insisted on, there is, nevertheless, a danger of over-stating its unity in spirit. The latest plays of Shakespeare betray a change in spirit which reflects the Jacobean age as distinguished from the Elizabethan age proper, and which is more clearly marked, for example, in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. So also the Caroline drama has characteristics which mark it off from its predecessors, and in spirit and tone it dates itself to the sensitive and instructed reader. It is evident that the drama gradually became more and more subject to the influence of the Court throughout the Stuart period, and that it correspondingly lost its quality of reflecting the general spirit of the people as it increasingly was adapted to the tastes of a narrow and sophisticated section of English society. Much would be revealed, for example, by a study of the theme of Honour as conceived by the drama at various stages in its history within our period. And the political history of the country is illuminated by the gradual change from the expression of practical patriotism in the drama to the expression of theoretical loyalty and obedience to abstract monarchy as elaborated under the Stuarts. In general, a fine health and naturalness showing itself in a balance of romance and realism, attained by the Elizabethans, is, on the whole, lost in the Stuart age.

On the other hand, the Stuart age profited by the Elizabethan development of literary art, and the

general literary standard of the Stuart drama is in some respects higher. It is to be noted that the actor-dramatist, so prominent among the Elizabethans proper, is less frequent in the Jacobean drama, and still less in the Caroline. Not only Shakespeare, but Ben Jonson also, and many another of their time, graduated from the apprenticeship of the boards. But Beaumont and Fletcher never acted, nor did Massinger. The drama, in the Stuart age, gradually became an accepted branch of literature, and the dramatist as professional man of letters and poet emerged, replacing the actor with a second string to his bow. When Ben Jonson's plays and poems were collected and printed in 1616, during his lifetime, his contemporaries smiled at the notion of publishing stage-plays as poetry. But in 1623 the dead Shakespeare's plays were printed in the famous First Folio with a chorus of poetic approval. The play, even for general contemporary opinion, passed into the history of literature, and Ben Jonson's claims for the drama were allowed.

Here we touch upon what is to my mind the greatest miracle of the Elizabethan drama. It is natural to our ways of thought, oppressed by long tradition, to consider the great Elizabethans primarily as authors of pieces of literature. But, in fact, they were primarily purveyors of entertainments, and popular entertainments at that. Their plays were written to gratify the tastes of a great variety of spectators, including labourers or apprentices, the criminal or disreputable classes of both sexes, merchants, tradesmen, men-about-town, students of the Universities or the Inns of Court, the gentry, courtiers, and Royalty

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itself. They were acted in London in inn-yards, as well as in regular theatres and in the halls of palaces, and on make-shift stages throughout the provinces. And they were mostly written in haste. As many as five authors might collaborate together in order to clap up a play as speedily as possible to satisfy the needs of the theatres of London, whose frequenters had an insatiable thirst for new plays. A season's intermittent run was the most a play might expect, though popular plays like *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Doctor Faustus* might be revived several times at considerable intervals. And the more we learn about the history of the Elizabethan stage, the more we realize to what extent it was controlled and financed by enterprising men of affairs who had no interest in literature, who might even be illiterate, and who were concerned solely with the drama and stage as a commercial proposition. The stage, in short, as an entertainment business, was one of the great industries of London, as it is to-day.

In these circumstances, so different from those of Greek tragedy, the literary perfection of Greek tragedy was rivalled, and the greatest poetic drama of the world's history, both in quality and quantity, was written. In the huge, though fragmentary, collection of plays which have been preserved to us in print or manuscript, literary excellence of one kind or another is rarely absent. The greatest glory of the Elizabethan drama must ever be the supreme excellence of Shakespeare, who shines like a resplendent full moon. But there are other noble planets and innumerable lesser stars in the Elizabethan heaven, and light everywhere.

We shall realize the wonder of this better if we look around us in the commercial theatre of present-day London. Imagine a selection of the books of current plays, revues, and musical comedies being printed and immortalized to posterity; it would be a sorry spectacle. Yet such a selection from the entertainments of an earlier age is the Elizabethan drama as we possess it.

While the general literary quality of the Elizabethan drama becomes more surprising when we realize these facts, the realization may save us from disappointment of extravagant hopes held out by indiscriminate and enthusiastic praisers of past times. A great deal of this old drama is mediocre literature, and there is much in it that is not only distasteful but is also, on all counts, bad art. But creative power leavens the whole mass, the spirit of poetry breathes in all its manifestations incalculably, and realistic humour bridges the gap of centuries between the Elizabethans and us. Only extraordinary bad luck, or want of competence in the reader, can make the reading of any Elizabethan play, taken at random, dull and uninteresting.

CHAPTER I

ORIGINS

It is usual to begin the story of the Elizabethan drama in the year 1576, when the first great London theatres, the Theatre and the Curtain, were built in Shoreditch.

But to do so is to ignore the importance of earlier episodes in the growth of stage and drama. Before capitalists like Brayne, a London grocer, would risk their money to support the enterprising venture of James Burbage, founder of the Theatre, the stage had already proved that it was sufficiently established in popular favour to offer a fair chance of profit on the considerable capital involved. And Brayne had already had experience of theatrical speculation, having financed the erection of a stage in the Red Lion Inn in Whitechapel in 1567. The great permanent theatres were the logical development of the experiments made in inn-yards in London, just as in their structure they reflected some of the features of the inn-yard, notably the open pit or standing-room and the galleries surrounding the stage on three sides, like the galleries surrounding the inn-yard or built in it. The drama had taken an important place as a popular entertainment in London before the theatres were built, and it was popular in the provinces before it grew to such proportions in London. London companies, it is true, on provincial tours, furnished country towns with occasional plays throughout the Elizabethan age. But these London companies were largely recruited from the provinces. Shakespeare came from Stratford to London and became a mainstay of the King's company of actors. For the drama was no new thing to the provinces and no London invention. There were local companies of performers, professional entertainers, as well as amateur players, the descendants of the medieval minstrels and of the citizens who took part in Miracle Plays and May Games throughout the

English country during a long period of nearly three hundred years. It is well to realize that the Miracle Plays, in which Bible stories were acted by citizens under the control of the city authorities, continued to be acted until within the lifetime of Shakespeare. The story of the Elizabethan stage and drama links on to, and overlaps, the story of the Miracle Play and the performances of city guilds. The Miracle Play is, therefore, one of the sources from which the professional London drama drew its traditions, its strength, its recruits, and its audiences. A second source is to be found in the small wandering companies of professional actors and entertainers, who presented the short plays known to us as Interludes or Moralities during the first half of the sixteenth century, in early Tudor days. They were nominally the servants of some nobleman, the protection of whose name saved them from being dealt with by law as vagabonds and masterless men. The great London companies, which developed out of these small groups of performers, were organized in the same fashion, and Shakespeare was a "servant" of the Lord Chamberlain, as the famous Edward Alleyn was a "servant" of the Lord Admiral, in their respective companies. Thirdly, the drama had been practised, partly as an entertainment and partly with educational intent, in the great schools and in the Universities. After elementary beginnings in the first years of the sixteenth century, this drama becomes important towards the commencement of Elizabeth's reign in 1558, and develops with the growth of the London stage and drama. At first, mainly concerned with the acting of classical Latin

plays, the Universities, both dons and students, practise the drama in English as well, with romantic and comic interests. The student of the classics who left the University and came up to London was often more than half-trained for the boards or for the writing of plays, and was invariably fully prepared to take his place at least among the audience. Young men from the Universities, indeed, played a large part in the provision of plays for London during the last decades of the sixteenth century, and their classical training ensured literary quality in their work.

Finally, the Court of the Tudors had long been the scene of dramatic entertainments in the form of masques and plays, in which Queen Elizabeth took no less delight than her father Henry VIII. Indeed, a special department of the Royal Household was instituted to provide and supervise these amusements, under the control of the Lord Chamberlain. The Office of the Revels, under the Master of the Revels, was mainly occupied with the preparation of dramatic performances for the chief festive seasons of the year, at Christmas and New Year, and at Shrovetide. Beginning as a temporary appointment, before 1494 at least, the Mastership of the Office developed permanence and importance as the Court drama grew in frequency and elaboration, and soon after Elizabeth came to the throne the Office had a budget of over fifteen hundred pounds, the equivalent of about fifteen thousand pounds to-day. During the season of 1600-1601 as many as eleven plays were performed at Court. The performances took place in the great hall of the royal palaces, wherever the Court was in residence, at

Whitehall, Greenwich, Hampton Court, Windsor, or Richmond. The plays were mostly furnished by various companies of professional actors, by the choir-boys of the Chapel Royal, of Windsor Chapel, or of St. Paul's Cathedral, by the boys of Westminster School, or by the law-students of the Inns of Court. And when the Court visited Oxford or Cambridge, the University presented plays to entertain it.

Several of the extant plays of the first years of Elizabeth's reign were among those acted at Court. Some were written by Masters of the Children of the Chapel. *Damon and Pythias*, for example, was written by Richard Edwards for performance by his boys at Court in 1564-1565, and illustrates the use to which the stage was to put classical story. Some were selected from the repertory of professional actors paid by the Revels to play at Court. *Horestes*, by John Pickering, was acted at Whitehall by a company of six players in 1567-1568. In general, it appears that there was little difference between the kind of plays that were intended for Court use and for general use, whether by the children, or by the professional interluders or players. Most of the extant early plays of the professionals—e.g., *Horestes*, *Cambises*, *Apius and Virginia*—are based on classical stories. And the realistic English comic scenes that are thrust into them were no less adapted for popular consumption than for the Court. There is no clear break between the farces, interludes, or morality-plays of the earliest Tudor dramatists, like Heywood or Rastell, and those of the earliest Elizabethans, and Rastell's *Calisto and Melibæa* points the way to the romantic drama to come.

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But in the interval the drama was modified by the influence of the Court and Universities and schools, which were deeply imbued with a love for the Latin classical literature, history, and legend. The Court also, as the centre of cosmopolitan culture, was interested in the many stories of romantic chivalry current throughout Europe, and in Italian literature which had almost a classical prestige. So we find among Court plays, as recorded in the Revels Accounts, many examples of plays evidently based on stories of medieval chivalry, like *The Knight of the Burning Rock* (1579), or on Italian romance, like *Ariodante and Genevora* (1583). To cultured taste also we must attribute the translation and adaptation of Latin and Italian regular comedy for performance on the English stage. The great schools had been acting the comedies of Terence and Plautus, in Latin, from 1520 onwards, and Nicholas Udall, headmaster of Eton in 1534, and of Westminster in 1553, wrote an English comedy, *Ralph Roister Doister*, which is constructed on the organic lines of the Latin dramatists, and gives English form and colour to characters and situations familiar in their plays. George Gascoigne, in 1566, turned a regular Italian comedy of Ariosto into an English play, *The Supposes*, acted at Gray's Inn in 1566. And Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, when they wrote the tragedy of *Gorboduc*, acted at Court in 1562-1563, on a theme of ancient British history, followed classical models of structure, and gave the dialogue much of the dignity, sententious weight, and rhetoric that they admired in the Latin tragedies of Seneca.

Yet these new influences, however strongly they

modified the older drama, did not overwhelm it. On the contrary, the old kinds of play held their own, and were at least equally important in the growth of the typical Elizabethan drama. *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, of uncertain academic authorship, is a roaring farce which is concerned with the loss of Dame Gurton's needle and its final discovery in the breeches of her servant Hodge. This "comedy" was certainly in five acts, has an organic plot, and was acted at Christ's College, Cambridge, somewhere about 1558. But in spirit it goes back to John Heywood's interludes, its characters and atmosphere are those of the rustic episodes of the *Second Shepherd's Play* of the Towneley Miracle Plays, and it is in all things realistic and English to the core. It has a rustic lover, Hodge, and his lass, Christian :

"Kirstian Clack, Tom Simpson's maid, by the mass,
comes hither tomorrow,
Cham not able to say, between us what may hap;
She smiled on me the last Sunday, when ich put
of my cap."

And it has a fine drinking song, "Back and side go bare, go bare," to a tune which has surely come down from many generations of lovers of English ale, and is utterly alien to the polished Roman connoisseurs of Falernian wine. Realistic English comedy runs through most plays based on classical story. The old morality-play, with its comic vice or clown dies hard, and may even be found at Court towards the end of the century. The allegory runs on till the end of the reign of Charles I. in a long succession of masques. The Bible story of the Miracle Plays continues to occupy the

stage, in the play of *Samson* at the Red Lion Inn in 1567, or in Peele's *David and Bethsabe* about 1590, though never, apparently, at Court. The May-Game play of Robin Hood, based on folk-story, survives in several plays on the same subject, as in Munday's two plays, *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* and its sequel, *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*, in 1598. And the old English sports, with dancing and song, associated with May-Day, continued to amuse later generations on the London stage, worked into plays. William Kempe, the comic actor, who was the original Dogberry in Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, was a famous Morris dancer.

The Elizabethan drama is, therefore, an extension and development of the old medieval English drama, profoundly influenced in form, subject, and style by the new culture of the Renaissance, by the new conditions of performance in the London theatres, and by the new and wider interests of its audiences. So, for example, the old processional Miracle Plays, in a large number of episodes, were replaced by single plays fitted for professional or amateur performance within a building. The short, anecdotic plays of John Heywood, suited to the capacities of a small company, could not furnish a full afternoon's or evening's entertainment, which demanded the drama on a larger scale and a more numerous company of actors. The classical and Italian drama provided the model for the new English drama suited to these needs, with a complete, connected plot of considerable range, worked out fully and consistently; and the great London companies and their theatres, established in a large and growing

city, with its permanent supply of paying spectators as well as the Court, were the instruments in establishing this drama. So established, the theatres attracted men of genius and culture, in whose work the literary and poetic traditions of the Old English drama were fortified by the example of the classical literatures, and the poetic drama was accepted with delight by a nation that esteemed and enjoyed poetry and rhetoric as well as wit and mirth.

The immense output of the London printers furnished ample material for the drama, thanks to the activities of men of letters and the general passion for reading. Playwrights had at their disposal endless sources of dramatic story, in chronicles of English history or of Greek and Roman history, in translations which revealed the treasures of classical legend and mythology or of modern Italian romantic fiction, in the many tales of Arthurian chivalric romance, in Old English narrative poetry, or in the new narratives of the Voyagers, and in translations of the classical drama itself. In addition to all this, the drama fulfilled the functions of a newspaper after a fashion. It not only reflected current thought, but current events, and drew its material from political history of the moment in France or Spain and from crimes and murders of recent notoriety in England.

So the dramatists used Holinshed's *Chronicles*, North's *Plutarch's Lives*, Golding's *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and Hakluyt's *Voyages*, to name only a few examples. It was the business of the theatres to find out by experiment what subjects and

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what treatment appealed most to their audiences. And it was the business of the dramatists to put such subjects into dramatic form satisfactory to the audiences, and at the same time to their own sense of literary art. Thus, in the widest variety of plays, the Elizabethan drama reflected the whole range of interests of Englishmen of that age, and offered a medium for widespread literary powers which amounted to genius in a few and to marked talent in the many who wrote for the stage.

CHAPTER II

THEATRES AND ACTORS

THE literary works survive in large numbers, though the majority of plays produced have been lost. Many were never printed. Of those that were printed in many cases no single copy has been preserved. There are some fifty contemporary manuscripts of plays, and a few prompt-copies among them, including some in the author's own handwriting. But little remains of what was then one of the most important factors in the drama, the art of the actors who presented the plays on the stage. So also, while we know a great deal about the history of the various theatres, from documents of many kinds, we are in some doubt concerning many questions of detail in the structure of the theatres and their methods of production.

It is certain that some of the actors were great artists, notably Edward Alleyn, Richard Burbage, and

Joseph Taylor in tragic rôles, William Kempe and Thomas Pollard in comic, and Nicholas Burt in women's parts (for boys and young men acted all such parts in our period). And the general standard of acting was high, the elder men taking boys as apprentices and training them to the art. Shakespeare himself, we are told, was "excellent in the quality he professes" (*i.e.*, as an actor), and there can be no real doubt that he played important parts. The actors, indeed, had a considerable say in the plays acted by their companies, not only when the dramatist was himself one of the actors. There is some evidence, and every probability, that plays were written then as now to suit the capacities of a company and the especial gifts of its best actors. The principal actors of the adult companies selected plays to be acted, and paid for them out of the company funds, directly or indirectly.

There were two distinct types of company which acted the plays of the dramatists, the Children's Companies and the Men's Companies. The Children's Companies, which we have already mentioned, were in the first place boys of the Royal chapels or of St. Paul's, who were trained by their Master not only to sing, but also to act plays for the entertainment of the Court. Subsequently the Master, anxious to add to the emoluments of his office, provided a hall and stage and charged admission-money for public performances, on the excuse that this was necessary to train them for Court performances. The Children of the Chapel and the Children of Paul's thus had a career as regular companies of public performers with their own theatres, and certainly by 1576 both were parts of the

general system of theatrical commercialism of London. Both, for example, were performing publicly in 1576 in the Blackfriars Theatre, which was founded that year by Farrant, who to all intents and purposes had leased the Chapel Boys from their Master, William Hunnis, for some years. And in 1601, when the Children of the Chapel were again at the Blackfriars Theatre, they were serious rivals to Shakespeare's company, and were referred to satirically in *Hamlet* as an "aerie of children, little eyases." Among the notable poets connected with the management of such companies were John Lyly, Samuel Daniel, and Michael Drayton. And they acted plays by many of the chief dramatists, Ben Jonson and John Marston in especial, as well as Lyly. It is important to realize that plays written for them were bound to take into account the kind of actors who were to present them. So, while Lyly's plays were admirably suited to their capacities, it is evident that Marlowe's *Faustus* or Shakespeare's *Hamlet* could hardly have been adequately acted by boys. Thus, the existence of Boy Companies is of great importance in considering the drama as literature.

The history of the Men's Companies, of which there were many, is difficult to follow and impossible to summarize. Some had a short life, some changed their name and their members frequently. Men left one company to join another. A company would pass from the patronage of one noble to that of another, or its patron's style and title might change, and with it the name of the company. Two companies might coalesce practically into one, and share a theatre together or occupy it on alternate days. Most had no theatre of

their own, and some changed their theatres several times. They acted both in London theatres and in the provinces, for the London companies went on tour with a repertory of plays from end to end of the country, and groups of actors even toured in Scotland and the Continent, in Holland, Denmark, France, and, above all, Germany.

The most important, the most stable, and the best known of the companies were the Admiral's Men, and the company of which Shakespeare was a member, known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men and, after James I. came to the throne in 1603 and took them into his own service, as the King's Men. The Admiral's Men were first organized under the patronage of Lord Howard, Earl of Nottingham, and so called the Earl of Nottingham's Men from before 1576 to 1585. They became known as the Lord Admiral's Men when Nottingham was appointed to that dignity in 1585. In 1603, they became Prince Henry's Men, and upon his death in 1611 they were patronized by the Elector Palatine, and are so styled thereafter. Contemporary documents, brought to light by the research of scholars, make us well acquainted with the history and constitution of these two companies. And the title-pages of printed plays inform us what companies acted the plays, so that we know a great deal about their productions and about the authors they employed.

The most famous of the Admiral's Men during Elizabeth's reign was Edward Alleyn, a great actor of imposing presence who acted the heroic parts in plays by Marlowe—*e.g.*, *Faustus* and *Tamburlaine*. He was also a good business man, made a fortune out of the

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theatre, and with it founded and endowed Dulwich College, where his portrait may be seen and many of the papers he left behind at his death. Practically all the notable dramatists of the first half of our period furnished one or more plays to this company, whose dealings are known to us in great detail from the Diary of Philip Henslowe, a theatre-owner who financed the company and made a good thing out of it, as did Alleyn, who married Henslowe's step-daughter.

So, also, the most famous of the King's Men, Shakespeare, amassed considerable wealth before he retired from his profession. He was a "sharer," one of a number of partners, which included the principal actors of the company, each of whom took a fixed fraction of the profits left after the costs of the theatre, of purchase and production of plays, and of minor actors who were paid weekly, had been met. This was the normal Elizabethan method of company-organization, and a share in a company was a great prize and had a market value. Richard Burbage was the greatest tragic actor of the first generation of this company, who acted Richard III. and Hamlet, for instance. The chief tragic parts in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, or Massinger, during the Stuart period, were acted by Joseph Taylor. Other notable men among Shakespeare's fellows were John Heminge and Henry Condell, the joint editors in 1623 of the collected edition of Shakespeare's works, known as the First Folio. The King's company seems to have had at its disposal the greater dramatists of the later period, and the history of its productions is virtually the history

of the higher order of drama under James I. and Charles I.

The selection of this company, indeed, to be the servants of the King himself in 1603 was a tribute to its stability and standing. Unlike the other companies, it was free of financial control of outsiders, and it was so far prosperous and well organized that it was able to build its own theatre, the Globe, in 1599, and to acquire another, the Blackfriars, in 1608, for winter use, the former entirely owned by members of the company, and the latter mainly. The dignity of the stage and of the actors' profession was in no small degree established by this company, and the drama as literature also was much beholden to it, and that not only through the genius of Shakespeare who, with Ben Jonson and others, carried on the work so nobly begun by Marlowe. Such a body of men, in favour at Court, and secure of their audiences, set up a standard of excellence that brought out the best in dramatists and audiences alike, and their numerous performances at Court testify to ideals transcending the commercialism that was the inevitable accompaniment of the financial control of other companies by men of small culture and even illiterate men.

Until the great theatres were built, beginning with the Theatre and the Curtain in Shoreditch in 1576, the London companies used various inns as their theatres, erecting stages in the inn-yards and charging admission or taking a collection. And these inns continued to be used after the theatres were built, the best-known being the Bell and the Crosskeys in Gracechurch Street, the Bel Savage on Ludgate Hill, and the Boar's

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Head in Whitechapel. There can be little question that not only stages were erected in these inn-yards, but in some cases at least "scaffolds" or stands for spectators as well. The theatres, when built, carried out in their structure the suggestions of the inn-yard arrangements, with improved seating accommodation, a proper tiring-house or green-room for the actors, and protection from weather for the stage, if not for those of the spectators who stood in the "yard" or pit. Only the galleries were covered in the typical round or octagonal theatre building known as the "public" theatre, like the Theatre and the Curtain (1576) in Shoreditch, the Rose (1587), the Swan (1595), the Globe (1598), and the Hope (1613), all on the Bank-side in Southwark, the Fortune (1599) in Finsbury, and the Red Bull (1605) in Clerkenwell. All except the Globe were the ventures of speculative financiers who let their theatres on hire to various companies, and took a share in the admission-money, generally the gallery receipts, in return for the use of the theatre. Most of the companies suffered sorely from the heavy drain upon their resources, though occasionally a financier like Henslowe, who built the Rose and the Fortune, was useful when actors and dramatists had run into debt and wanted money to get out of prison. Actors were improvident mostly, and the business man had the best of the deal. It is odd to find that then, as now, the cost of leasing theatres was apt to break the actors' backs. The exception throughout seems to have been Shakespeare's company, which had its own theatres. The other principal item of expenditure was the purchase of costumes, for the plays were magnifi-

cently dressed, in an age of great ostentation in dress.

I cannot here go deeply into the vexed questions of stage-structure and scenery. The principal facts are these. In the public theatres the stage projected into the unroofed auditorium, being surrounded on three sides by spectators in the pit and in the galleries. The actors entered and left by two doors at the back, left and right, or by a recess in the centre. This recess was curtained, and could be used as an "inner stage." The curtain could be drawn to "discover" people in a bedroom, a study, a tavern, or on a throne. It could also be drawn to close on an indoor scene. There was also an "upper stage," which was a gallery over the stage (connected with the lower stage or the tiring-house by a staircase), the continuation of the spectators' gallery. This was used for walls, battlements of castles, or any elevated scene. There was no curtain between the main stage and the spectators, and the actors were in close touch with the spectators. They were not only taking part in a stage-play, but giving also displays of declamation, as of other less dignified forms of the entertainer's skill, to their audience. Great speeches, like those of Tamburlaine or Hamlet, were addressed as much to the audience as to the persons in the play. Rhetoric, poetry, verse, and music, as well as mirth, jests, and horse-play, were the natural medium in which the drama thus intimately related itself to its audiences. The Elizabethan drama, however realistic, is therefore never naturalistic in intent. The modern naturalistic drama of artistic endeavour, in which the audience is scrupulously ignored and is sometimes

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even buried in darkness, is the antipodes of the Elizabethan drama which, like its great rival the Greek tragedy, was a social function and a daylight function for the most part.

The technique of acting and of writing plays doubtless differed a little in the so-called "private" theatres—*e.g.*, the Blackfriars and the Whitefriars—which were adaptations of large halls, roofed and lit by artificial light, and which lacked the inner and upper stages of the public theatres. But performances in them had the same essential characteristics of a poetic drama in the closest relation with its audiences, a relation which is most obviously seen in the custom of speaking prologues and epilogues, often delivered by an actor speaking in his dramatic character, as by Rosalind speaking the epilogue to *As You Like It*. In an extreme form, it may be seen in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, a dramatic satire in which actors, pretending to be members of the audience, take a considerable part in the play, a new-old device.

The main characteristics of the Elizabethan drama were thus largely determined not only by the spirit of the age and by the history of its origins, but also by the conditions in which the plays were acted and by the relations between stage and house. It remains to add that, whatever the true facts are concerning the much-debated question of scenery in the theatres, the setting of the stage never interfered with rapid action of the play. It is certain that there was a considerable amount of properties, some of them even elaborate and practicable, such as rocks or tombs, in the nature

of rudimentary scenery. Trap-doors were used, as for the entrance of Mephistophilis in Marlowe's *Faustus*, for graves and ditches, and even to bring a magic arbour up on the stage. But the action was never held up by the necessity of an interval for scene changing, and if properties were moved, they were moved by characters in the play in the course of their parts. Thus, the drama was able to respond to one of the principal demands of its patrons; the demand for a good story, full of action, and narrated dramatically with speed and vividness. There was no real attempt at scenic illusion, and dramatic illusion was all-important. There can be no question that here we have one of the secrets of the literary excellence of the Elizabethan drama, which was backed up by admirable acting and by a receptive and imaginative audience. The action and the characters were set, not in painted scenery, but in the beauty and colour of poetry. And some of the finest poetry is called forth by the need to suggest place and atmosphere in dialogue. So in Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, to take an early example, the audience is induced to conjure up the scene in Oxford by poetic suggestion of landscape.

“*Emperor.* Trust me, Plantagenet, these Oxford schools

Are richly seated near the river-side:
 The mountains full of fat and fallow deer,
 The battling pastures lade with kine and flocks,
 The town gorgeous with high-built colleges,
 And scholars seemly in their grave attire,
 Learned in searching principles of art.”

CHAPTER III

SHAKESPEARE'S PREDECESSORS

It is usual, and it is just, to celebrate the literary importance of the work of a group of men, mostly University men, many of whose plays have come down to us, and who were the immediate predecessors of Shakespeare as playwrights in London. The careers of the University wits indeed overlapped that of Shakespeare, and there is every reason for believing that one of them, Robert Greene, was girding at Shakespeare in his famous diatribe against actors and actor-dramatists. "Trust them not, for there is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers . . . being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a countrie" (Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit*, 1592). There was certainly some professional jealousy here, on two grounds. First, about 1591 the Queen's men, for whom Greene wrote plays, were losing popularity, while the Lord Chamberlain's men were advancing in favour both with the public and at Court. Secondly, the cultured University man, with his classical training, was proud of his learning and jealous of the success of the base and unlettered actors who employed him or, what was worse, dispensed with his services and wrote their own plays. Greene, Peele, Marlowe, and Kyd were approximately, in fact, of the same generation as Shakespeare, who was born in 1564. And there can be no doubt that their plays, written and acted before his first acknowledged plays, not only had literary worth of a

kind undreamt of before them, but also set up a model and a standard of literary intent that stimulated their rivals and followers to good effect. Indeed, though Sir Philip Sidney in his *Apology for Poetry* passes severe strictures upon the drama then current upon the stage, in 1580 or 1581, he would have probably qualified his comments before the end of the decade, if he had seen Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* or *Faustus*, or Lyly's prose comedies. And literary criticism enters the drama itself in Peele's *Old Wives' Tale* (1591).

Yet these young men were not deliberately setting out to reform the stage, nor were they primarily pursuing literary aims. They were making a living as best they could, with their native wit and their education to help them. The University student or graduate of Elizabeth's days was constantly bemoaning the want of appreciation in practical shape of his learning. An amusing picture of the unappreciated scholar is given in *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* and *The Return from Parnassus*, two Cambridge University plays, acted at the end of the century at St. John's College. Even the scholar-dramatist, it is complained, is not esteemed duly. Burbage and Kempe appear in person in *The Return from Parnassus*, and Kempe remarks in words which satirically betray his want of scholarship :

"Few of the university men pen plays well, they smell too much of that writer Ovid, and that writer Metamorphosis, and talk too much of Proserpina and Jupiter. Why, here's our fellow Shakespeare puts them all down, ay, and Ben Jonson, too."

Yet the London actors and stage had in fact welcomed these young men. Robert Greene tells a vivid story in the autobiographical pamphlet, already quoted, of how he came to write plays for a company. The hero Roberto is on his way to London, having married a gentleman's daughter, cast her off, and left her in Lincolnshire. Lamenting his destitute condition, he is overheard and accosted by another traveller. Roberto asks for advice on making a living, and is told that his interlocutor can supply his needs,

"For men of my profession get by scholars their whole living." "What is your profession?" said Roberto. "Truly, sir," said he, "I am a player." "A player?" quoth Roberto, "I took you rather for a gentleman of great living. . . ." "So I am" (quoth the player) . . . "my very share in playing-apparel will not be sold for two hundred pounds. . . ." "How mean you to use me?" "Why, sir, in making plays," said the other, "for which you shall be well paid, if you take the pains."

It was after this fashion that Marlowe, Kyd, Lodge, Greene, and Peele came to write plays for London companies as their main source of livelihood. Robert Greene (1558-1592), born at Norwich, a Cambridge graduate, also engaged in journalism of a kind. He wrote a series of love romances in the euphuistic style made fashionable by Lyly; and a number of pamphlets, some autobiographical, some describing the criminal life of London, of which he seems to have had a curious and full knowledge. He died in London, after a short and dissolute life, in extreme distress. Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) was the son of a

Canterbury shoemaker, took his M.A. at Cambridge in 1587, and made fame at once as a playwright with *Tamburlaine*, and as a poet with *Hero and Leander*. In 1588 he was in disgrace and due to appear at the Middlesex Sessions for an unknown offence. Later on, in 1593, he was sent for by the Privy Council, on a charge of atheism and blasphemy. But before he came to trial he was murdered by one Ingram Fryser. Thomas Kyd (1558-1594) was the son of a well-known London scrivener, and probably not a University man. His *Spanish Tragedy* was an even greater success than *Tamburlaine*, with whose author Kyd was closely associated, sharing a room with him and becoming involved with him in his troubles. Kyd was arrested in 1593, and was released after explanations which threw all blame on Marlowe. He died in the following year in utter poverty.

Lodge, Peele, and Lyly seem to have led more discreet and prosperous lives. Thomas Lodge (1557-1625) had a Lord Mayor of London for father, and an Oxford education. Like Greene, he wrote romances as well as plays, and one of them was written on a long voyage when Lodge took part in an adventure of the famous Cavendish to South America (1591-1593). He was also a lyric and satirical poet, in general a good example of the man of letters ready to turn his hand to anything. Lodge subsequently took to a more stable profession, about 1602, became a physician, having qualified at Avignon in France, and lived a long and respectable life in this capacity. George Peele (1557-1596) was a Londoner, and a graduate of Christ Church, Oxford, to which he returned in 1583

with a reputation as poet and dramatic expert, and produced two plays for his college. He was employed profitably by the City of London to write and arrange a number of their Pageants, from 1585 onwards, on the occasions of the Lord Mayors' Shows. And he was helped also by the patronage of noblemen like Lord Burghley, to whom he dedicated his poem, *The Tale of Troy*. The patronage of the great was a frequent additional means of livelihood to the respectable man of letters and dramatist, especially to those who had not the profession of acting as a staple source of income, as none of these men had. John Lyly (1555-1606) came of a learned and clerkly family, and went to Magdalen College, Oxford. He was taken into the service of Lord Delaware, and made his name as an author by his famous didactic novel, *Euphues*, in 1578. In 1580 he was employed by Edward, Earl of Oxford, and came into touch with the theatre, with the help of Oxford's influence. He held a lease of a Blackfriars theatre, and was in control of a company of boys under Oxford's patronage, in 1584, for whom he wrote *Campaspe*. He subsequently continued to write plays for the Paul's children up to 1591, most of which were acted before the Queen. His seasonable hopes of preferment at Court, above all to the Mastership of the Revels, were disappointed, though he received considerable gifts both from Oxford and from the Queen. Lyly certainly enjoyed the highest social status of this first generation of dramatists, as he was the earliest in the field of drama.

His dramatic work was aimed mostly to suit the tastes of a cultivated audience, as was his *Euphues*,

though it would be an error to think that they were not appreciated by the general audience or reader. His plays are evidently fitted for the acting of boys, and for the simple "private" or Court stage. The typical Lyly play relates some popular story of classical mythology, in polished, witty prose dialogue, without much range or complexity of action. In *Campaspe*, the story of the love of Alexander the Great for a captive maiden was told. The interest lay partly in the stage-presentation of such famous persons as Alexander, Diogenes, Plato, and Aristotle, and the great artist Apelles, Alexander's rival in the love of Campaspe. But the Court also saw its own brilliant wit reflected at its best in the dialogue, which set a model to its hearers. And there was constant reference to the Queen herself. The play of *Endymion*, for example—the young hero beloved by Diana, the virgin goddess—offered opportunities for burning incense before the Virgin Queen, who delighted in the name of Diana or of Cynthia, the Moon-Goddess. And Lyly, with his ambition to spur on his loyalty, was not the man to miss them. The plays were further adorned by songs, exquisitely sung by the boys. There is little realism, and little dramatic characterization in Lyly's plays, nor is the old mythology brought to life in any true sense. They have the unreality of the artificial masque or pastoral, and the passionless sweetness and perfection of the boys' choir for whom they were written. And for the first time the public theatre saw plays in which a master of prose style wrote the dialogue and poured into it the resources of intellectual ingenuity, making the dialogue worth listening to for its own sake, apart from story,

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character, or topical allegory. It was Lyly, after all, who taught the drama to "load every rift with ore," though much of his writing may appear to a modern reader to be rather gilt than sheer gold. And it was he who first entertained audiences in England with high comedy, presenting the manners and speech of good society, in a fictitious world with its own conventions.

Marlowe and Kyd loaded their plays with ore of another kind, befitting tragedy rather than comedy, for which they had no gift. In their tragedies they expressed their passion and their imagination in the form of dramatic rhetoric. While Marlowe was immeasurably the greater poet of the two pioneers of tragedy, Kyd had no mean poetic powers and had greater constructive ability. His *Spanish Tragedy* held the stage for thirty years from about 1588, being revised and revived frequently. It was a romantic tragedy of contemporary life, and brought familiar life into relation with high dramatic passion, thus setting an example for the great masterpieces of later Elizabethans. The action of its story of love and revenge is vivid and violent, and its characters are of heroic stature. There could hardly be a Londoner to whom old Hieronimo, the tragic father, Don Horatio, his slain son, and Belimperia, the beloved of Horatio, were not familiar figures. Finally, the play is of full range and scope, moving on logically step by step, through episode contributory to the main story, with the beginnings of the development of character in action. And it even uses with success the complexity of the play within a play. It is far more important to

realize these facts than to know that Kyd had studied the Latin tragedies of Seneca, had translated a French tragedy, *Cornelia*, of Senecan mode, and that both Seneca and Kyd rejoice in violent death, ghosts, and rant.

Marlowe's first plays show little power of construction. The two parts of *Tamburlaine* (1587) narrate the long career of conquest of the Scythian shepherd who conquered the whole world known to him, and the drama proceeds in a series of grandiose pageants and of magnificent rhetoric, until at length death strikes the conqueror down. *Doctor Faustus* (1588), which relates the dreadful fate of the great "conjurer" who sells his soul to the devil and must in the end become his prey, comes nearer home to the reader as to the spectator. For three hundred years and more men have thrilled to the splendour of Faustus' rhapsody upon the peerless Helen, and to the immortal anguish and despair of the dreadful last hour before he is dragged away, calling in vain upon Christ, to damnation. But *Tamburlaine* also reflects the soul and the thoughts of its maker, and its hero is strangely possessed of the fiery passions and the soaring intellectual and æsthetic ambitions of the Renaissance and of Marlowe. Zenocrate, Tamburlaine's queen, is adored as Beauty incarnate, inexpressible, even as Helen is the last and greatest desire of Faustus.

These plays were written for the Admiral's Men, and both were revived for performance at the Rose Theatre in 1594. The heroes of both were acted by Edward Alleyn, with imposing presence, sonorous voice, and an understanding mind. High tragedy could

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not have come, despite all the poets, but for adult actors, and for great actors, and for a receptive audience, all capable of heroic thoughts and imaginative strength. Such actors, trained in declamation, gave the fullest value to Marlowe's verse, and collaborated with him in endowing the drama with that miraculous medium of blank verse, which Marlowe, more than any other one man, established on the English stage, and bequeathed it to Shakespeare to be brought to a more universal aptness for all the moods of the poetic play.

Of Marlowe's remaining plays, *The Jew of Malta* (1589) tells a lurid story of Machiavellian villainy which is duly punished, and exhausts the resources of sensational dialogue and action. Marlowe was fast learning his business as dramatist as well as poet. *Edward the Second* (1592) shows him to have attained no small measure of constructive power and the ability to merge himself more fully into his characters. If both Faustus and Tamburlaine are Christopher Marlowe in disguise, the unhappy, desolate king at the point of violent death is himself, and the pathos of his fate arises out of his own character. It is just indeed to urge that Marlowe might have risen to the greatest dramatic heights as well as the poetic heights which he achieved in a short and broken life.

These three, Lyly, Kyd, and Marlowe were the pioneers, and Greene, Peele, and Lodge follow upon their tracks to some extent. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is emulated by Greene's *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*, by Peele's *Battle of Alcazar* and his lost play *The Turkish Mahomet and Hiren the Fair Greek* with a

heroine who was as notorious as Hieronimo. Pistol, that fustian rascal, in ranting mood in Shakespeare's *Henry the Fourth* (Part II., ii., 4, 124 ff.), refers to her, along with *Tamburlaine* and the *Battle of Alcazar* with its rival heroine Calipolis. *Edward the Second* is followed by Peele's *Edward the First*, and the English history play is firmly established. *Doctor Faustus* makes "conjuring" plays popular, and Greene produces *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, while Peele writes *The Old Wives' Tale*, and Anthony Munday follows with *John a Kent and John a Cumber*.

Such imitation was bound to occur with the theatres in hot rivalry, and when *Tamburlaine* brought a rush of spectators to the Admiral's Men (then somewhere in the City), it was natural that the Queen's Men (probably) should set Greene to work in emulation with *Alphonsus*, and the Admiral's Men should again reply with Peele's *Battle of Alcazar*. It was good business all round, and fashions of this kind, dictated by the success of a new type of play, run through the whole history of the drama up to the time of modern mystery plays, the legitimate successors of the "conjuring" plays of Marlowe and Greene, or of the topical murder plays current somewhat later.

Peele was perhaps the finest poet of these followers, and *David and Bethsabe* his finest and most original play. His verse has not only smoothness but strength and passion, and he has mastered the art of giving rhetorical and dramatic structure to a long speech. In *Edward the First* there is a quantity of comic episode which foreshadows the use by Shakespeare of familiar life linked up with the dignity of history, but it is

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far inferior to its model and is a travesty of history. Greene's heroic *Alphonsus of Aragon* and *Orlando Furioso* are interesting as showing his supple competence to attempt any kind of play, even such as demanded a stronger genius, and to succeed reasonably well. *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, a story of rival English and German magicians, combined with the love story of Lacy and Margaret of Fressingfield, better fitted his talent. There is notable charm in the idyllic episodes of the Suffolk country, and in the dramatic picture of Margaret, who is, with the tragic Belimperia, the most outstanding of pre-Shakespearian representations of women. His *James the Fourth*, which purports to be a history of a Scottish king, is in reality a romantic tale adorned with a setting of fairies, with Oberon, King of Fairies, playing a large part, and with a large company of traditional comic characters. It is effectively written, most skilfully put together, and is altogether a curious and original entertainment. Greene was, above all, a successful playwright, and no mean poet into the bargain, with occasional splendour, as in the famous outburst of Margaret in *Friar Bacon* :

“ Why, thinks King Henry's son that Margaret's love
Hangs in th' uncertain balance of proud time?
That death shall make a discord of our thoughts?
No, stab the earl, and 'fore the morning sun
Shall vaunt him thrice over the lofty east,
Margaret will meet her Lacy in the heavens.”

Little need be said of Lodge and Nashe. *The Wounds of Civil War* and *A Looking-Glass for London and England* (written with Greene), tell us little of Lodge's

possible capacity for the drama, which he only practised for a while. Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592), like his lost *Isle of Dogs* (1597), are later in date, and are of little importance.

Both Lodge and Nashe, however, show to a marked degree the abiding influence of an earlier stage of the drama, which is also perceptible in the more original of these pre-Shakespearean dramatists and in the subjects chosen for treatment. Nashe's surviving play is coloured by the old morality-play, though informed with its author's satirical ingenuity. *A Looking-Glass* is in clear descent from both miracle and morality, and links moral disquisition and criticism of London society with the Bible story of Jonah and the whale. So Peele took the story of David, though he made a new thing of it. Lyly's mythological plays were on subjects of a kind which had long been popular at Court, as the records of the Revels tell us. But it is certain that he treated them in a new way. In general, it is regrettable that so little of the drama has survived to show us the kind of play that immediately preceded the University wits. The best example that has survived is *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, which illustrates the chivalric romance that was once so much favoured at Court performances, and explains Sidney's criticisms. It is formless, platitudinous, wandering, and is written in tumbling rhymed fourteeners. And it shows admirably, by contrast, what was achieved both in structure and in literary treatment by the new generation, building upon old foundations, but bringing new material and new art, worthy prophets of greater things to come.

CHAPTER IV

THE LATER ELIZABETHANS

THE literary excellence of the work of this early generation of poets and dramatists was recognized by contemporary critics, even as their plays were appreciated as public entertainments by their audiences. Their most popular plays were printed and sold, the companies which owned them thus making a further profit on them from the sale of the theatre copy to the publisher, and incidentally bringing the drama into the history of literature. They were printed in small volumes of quarto size, each containing one play and selling for sixpence. The first of Shakespeare's plays to be printed, *Titus Andronicus*, survives in its first edition in an unique copy, which was sold for some thousands of pounds when it came into the market some years ago. It bears the date of 1594. By 1598 there was a considerable body of dramatic literature in print, read with avidity and diffused all over the country, in the chapman's pack or in the libraries of country justices or Oxford dons.

The most significant document of literary criticism of the drama, after Sidney's *Apology*, is Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia*. It is evident from this collection of notes of reading that the popular drama is literature in 1598, whereas in 1580 it was excluded from literature by Sidney. Meres, as is well known, gives the highest praise to Shakespeare, and cites a group of his plays. And he goes on to give a list of

dramatists divided into two groups. Among "our best for Tragedie" he mentions Marlowe, Peele, Kyd, Shakespeare, Drayton, Chapman, Dekker, and Jonson; and among "the best for Comedy," Lyly, Lodge, Gascoigne, Greene, Shakespeare, Nashe, Thomas Heywood, Munday, Chapman, Porter, Wilson, Hathaway, and Chettle. It is, of course, surprising to find Ben Jonson and Dekker cited as tragic dramatists and not as writers of comedy. But, for one thing, Ben Jonson's first great comedy, *Every Man in his Humour*, was not written and acted until 1598, after this book was printed. Moreover, we must bear in mind constantly that the plays that survive are but a fraction of the plays produced, in most cases, by any given author. And most, if not all, of these playwrights wrote plays in collaboration with one or more co-authors, as well as plays written alone.

Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*, even, when first produced, was partly the work of another dramatist. In his early days Jonson once revised *The Spanish Tragedy*, adding scenes to it. On another occasion he sketched out a plot and scenario for a play, which others worked upon and completed. So Anthony Munday, described by Meres as "our best plotter," probably had a gift for what we might now call scenario-writing of this kind. And it seems most likely that such scenarios were cut up and divided into acts, which were distributed among a group of two, three, four, or even five dramatists to write, for the sake of rapid delivery. The taint of collaboration hangs over the Elizabethan drama throughout its long course, and it is especially marked in these earlier decades, among the plays we

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have been discussing so far as well as many of those now to be mentioned. Most discussion of the Elizabethan drama has been vitiated by the fallacious belief that it is possible to apportion the various scenes of a play written in collaboration between its authors, by applying tests of style or by asserting critical impressions. This holds true even of some of Shakespeare's earliest plays—*e.g.*, *Henry the Sixth*—as of Greene and Lodge's *Looking-Glass*, as of those of Middleton and Rowley, or of Middleton and Dekker, and of seventeenth-century plays such as those of Beaumont and Fletcher, or of Massinger and Fletcher. Thus, though it is most convenient to group the drama under authors, this complication must be borne in mind throughout. And it is significant to find Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Chapman, for instance, apparently eschewing collaboration as they grew in prestige and power and developed a sense of the literary value of their work.

Herein lies, perhaps, the true ground for dividing into two groups the new authors named by Meres. On the one hand, we have the journeyman playwright, who may have poetic or comic genius, but who is at the beck and call of his employers and writes to order, controlled by exigency. Such are Dekker and Heywood among the greater dramatists, and Chettle, Drayton, Hathaway, Munday, Porter, and Wilson among the lesser. These are men whose work will be found recorded in Henslowe's Diary, who wrote for whatever company desired a play at their hands, and who were content to work in harness with others and on any task that was set them. On the other hand, we

have the men who rose superior to circumstance, whose prestige made them sought after, and who were able in some measure to pursue artistic aims with greater freedom. While this is evident in Shakespeare, who wrote only for the company of which he was an active member, it is no less evident in Ben Jonson once he had attained fame and reputation, and to a less degree in Chapman. We shall find this general distinction running through the Elizabethan dramatists to the end.

When we consider the surviving plays of our first group among Meres's dramatists, and reflect on the conditions in which they wrote, we may well wonder at the literary power they display. Henslowe's Diary suggests how far the poverty and improvidence of these men placed them at the mercy of the man with money, whom they are constantly pressing for loans, to whom they submit instalments of plays, to whom they promise early completion of a play, always apparently in straits and in haste. Henry Porter had a share in five plays sold to Henslowe for the Admiral's Men within a year in 1598-1599. Yet one of them was probably *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon*, a comedy of rural realism of extraordinary strength, which foreshadows the Jonsonian comedy of humours and reminds us that Porter and Jonson collaborated with Chettle in 1598 in a lost play, *Hot Anger soon Cold*. Henry Chettle (1560-1607) was a printer and stationer before he took to the drama. From 1598 to 1603 he had a hand in forty-eight plays, was constantly in debt, and in 1602 was obliged to bind himself, in return for £3, to write only for the Admiral's men. The only play we have that is entirely his own

is *Hoffman, a Revenge for a Father*, a lurid and sensational melodrama, taken from a Danish story, which helps us to appreciate the *Hamlet* to come, and *The Spanish Tragedy* which it followed. Yet it has power and competence, and consistency of tragic tone. The best known of his plays are the Robin Hood plays, in which he collaborated with Munday. Anthony Munday (1553-1633) started life as an actor, became a stationer like Chettle, continued as a Government spy, and held minor offices in that capacity, and incidentally was an extremely busy journalist and playwright. He wrote plays for Henslowe and pageants for Lord Mayors' Shows, and evidently was a worthy, industrious, and successful man in his mediocre fashion. He was the constant butt of satire at the hands of Ben Jonson, Marston, and the anonymous author of *Histrionomastix* (1589) under the names of Posthaste or Antonio Balladino, the type of the pure journeyman of the stage. *John a Kent and John a Cumber* survives in a manuscript in Munday's own hand. It was first acted at the Rose in 1594, and proved a worthy rival to the romantic magic of *Friar Bacon*, with a love-story of complex and rapid action, and dramatic devices that Shakespeare was to use later. "Turnop with his Crewe of Clownes" and Shrimp appear again, though vastly improved upon, in *Bottom* and in *Ariel*. Indeed, the play is among the most notable of early romantic comedies. Two other plays, *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*, and *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*, written with Chettle, betray again his romantic propensities in the unequal alliance of history with old folk-tales of Robin Hood

and Maid Marian. The romantic drama owes more than is generally realized to this old-fashioned writer, whose long career bridges three reigns, and whose work is constantly recalling greater names to our mind.

Dekker and Heywood were of a later generation. They also had long careers, and both lived also into the reign of Charles I., though they were writing before the end of the sixteenth century. And with them we come again into the region of drama, which is excelled only by Shakespeare, whether in comedy or tragedy. When Charles Lamb described Heywood as a "prose Shakespeare," it may be a little doubtful what he meant exactly, but he was certainly a notable rival to Shakespeare in his own day, and, along with Dekker and Ben Jonson, loomed large in the theatrical world over a long period. Thomas Dekker (1572-1632), a Londoner born and bred, was one of Henslowe's needy dramatists in 1598, and spent a number of years in a debtors' prison, though this did not prevent him from exercising the art of a dramatist freely and frequently, or from writing a series of pamphlets, in realistic and satirical vein, upon London life. He wrote, in whole or in part, over forty plays, mostly for the Admiral's Men at the Rose and Fortune, and subsequently for Queen Anne's Men at the Red Bull, and generally in collaboration. He was still writing in 1624, when a topical play brought him before the Star Chamber for libel. But he seems to have died a respectable citizen. Of his surviving plays only *Old Fortunatus* (1598), *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), *The Whore of Babylon* (1606), and *Match Me in London* (revised 1623) are wholly his. And they show

Dekker as a shrewd and humorous spectator of London citizen life, with veins of pathos, lyric charm, and passion in a minor key that imbue citizen life with romance and beauty, as well as mirth and high spirits. He had "poetry enough for anything," wrote Lamb, and he certainly had enough to breathe a new spirit into citizen drama without losing his sense of reality and truth. His plays were mostly written for a citizen audience, at the Rose as at the Red Bull, with which Heywood also was closely associated. And it is useless to deny that the notable development of the citizen and domestic drama in the hands of these two men had a good deal to do with the audiences for which they wrote. Thomas Heywood (1574-1641) may have been a Cambridge graduate. He certainly had considerable knowledge of classical story. But he was distinctly a journeyman dramatist, though he achieved greatness in some plays. He was an actor himself in the Admiral's Men, and in the reign of James I. was a sharer in the Queen's company at the Red Bull. Probably the most prolific of all Elizabethans, he tells us himself in 1633, that he "had either an entire hand, or at least a main finger" in two hundred and twenty plays, of which about twenty survive in print or in manuscripts in his own hand. Among his earliest plays is one which had an extraordinary popularity. The *Four Prentices of London* (1592) celebrates the epic deeds of London apprentices in a crusading romance. Naturally, "the Honest and High-spirited Prentices," to whom Heywood dedicated it, relished this glorification of London tradesmen, though more sophisticated taste smiled at it. Beaumont and Fletcher lampooned

this play and citizen romance in general in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Throughout his career Heywood certainly aimed principally at following fashions and pleasing his audiences. If history was in vogue, he followed suit with *Sir Thomas Wyatt* (1602, with Dekker), or with two topical plays upon the reign of Elizabeth, called *If You Know not me, You Know Nobody, or, The Troubles of Queen Elizabeth*, in which he deals also with the Spanish Armada and the building of the Royal Exchange. When classical story was desired, he obliged the Red Bull with a whole series of plays, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *The Golden Age*, *The Silver Age*, *The Brazen Age*, and *The Iron Age*, covering a good deal of the *Iliad* and of classical mythology botched up into popular drama. But it is significant that the drama of ordinary bourgeois life inspired him to his best work. His masterpiece, and one of the great plays of the whole age, is *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (which in kind and quality is well seconded by *The Honest Whore*, of which Dekker was the principal author). The story is that of Mistress Anne Frankford, led on gradually into sin by a seducer Wendoll, and overcome by remorse, of the discovery of her faithlessness by her husband and of his great and forgiving heart. Tragic power and all but the deepest soundings of emotion are drawn here out of a familiar story of domestic life. It is pleasant to turn to Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West*, and to see there that he could also portray joyous seafaring adventure with which citizen life was closely associated then, and show us the happy romance of Spencer and delightful Bess Bridges of Plymouth, "a

Girl worth Gold." It is the highest praise of the great Elizabethans that life, and not any one conception or mood of life, is their theme, and their drama is many coloured and various. There is greatness in the man who can rejoice, at the beginning of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, in the merry bridal when

" the mad lads
And country lasses, every mother's child,
With nosegays and bridelaces in their hats,
Dance all their country measures, rounds, and jigs,"

yet can attune himself to the tragic ending of that marriage, and conclude the story in noble reconciliation in Frankford's words:

" This hand once held my heart in faster bonds
Than now 'tis gripped by me. God pardon them
That made us first break hold . . .
Even as I hope for pardon at that day,
When the great Judge of heaven in scarlet sits,
So be thou pardoned."

Dekker never reached this tragic power, as far as we can judge from what survives of him. But he has many gifts, not least a lyric gift that is surpassed by none, and the songs strewn in plays in which he had a hand have a peculiar exquisiteness, freshness, and simplicity:

" Golden slumbers kiss your eyes,
Smiles awake you when you rise,
Sleep, pretty wantons, do not cry,
And I will sing a lullaby,
Rock them, rock them, lullaby."

Such songs, sung beautifully to the no less exquisite lyric music of the Elizabethans, must have run like

wild-fire all over London, even as a song concerning "Cupid, prince of Gods and men" became the popular rage at one time, according to Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. We have popular songs also to-day, but the Elizabethans were mostly practised musicians and singers themselves, and had taste in these matters.

There is no good ground for believing, however, that they theorized about the drama. One may doubt whether even the cultured classes set up as conscious critics until Ben Jonson, the greatest of the second class of Meres's dramatists, placed critical questions before his public. In *Every Man in his Humour* (1598) and *Every Man out of his Humour*, (1599), the "Comedy of Humours" sets up a dramatic intention which takes us back to Latin comedy, and which Sidney lays down as the proper function of comedy. It has a satirical and moral purpose, and proceeds by the exhibition of the abnormal in human nature, of men and women dominated by some outstanding characteristic. This dramatic study of types of character is also practised in the short prose "Characters" of Overbury or Earle. Such comedy does not aim in the first place at telling a story, as does that of Dekker or Heywood or Shakespeare, but at realistic criticism of life. While Ben Jonson labours this point, and questions of construction, in critical interludes in *Every Man out of his Humour*, it would be too much to say that the "Comedy of Humours" created a school or ousted the romantic comedy. Certainly Chapman's *An Humorous Day's Mirth* (1599) is a play of "Humours," and Jonson had a following among

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the dramatists of the next generation in the "Sons of Ben" like Brome. But the "Comedy of Humours" arose out of and was merged into realistic comedy in general, and the story resumed its proper importance. Benjamin Jonson (1572-1637) was London born, though of Scottish descent, and educated at Westminster School. The only University degree he had was the honorary M.A., which Oxford conferred upon him in 1620, an extraordinary tribute. In 1597 Henslowe lent £4 to him, describing him as a "player," and it is likely that his imprisonment in that year was for acting in Nashe's *Isle of Dogs*. He began his career as dramatist for the Admiral's Men, with lost plays written in collaboration, one being a topical murder-play, *Page of Plymouth*, with Dekker, and another *Richard Crookback*, the earliest being probably the surviving *The Case is Altered*. But he early obtained a footing with Shakespeare's company at the Globe, for whom his two "Humour" comedies were written, as were most of his great plays later, *Sejanus* (1603), *Volpone* or *The Fox* (1606), *The Alchemist* (1610), and *Catiline* (1616). He also wrote for other companies, however, *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), *The Poetaster* (1601), and *Epicæne* or *The Silent Woman* (1609) were acted by boy companies at the Blackfriars, and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) by Lady Elizabeth's Men at the Hope. When he returned to playwriting, after an interval of some nine years, his last comedies were written for the King's Men again, *The Staple of News*, *The New Inn*, *The Magnetic Lady*, and *The Tale of a Tub* (1625-1633).

Ben Jonson might have said, with Browning, "I

was a fighter ever," from his early days as a soldier in Flanders, to his mortal duel with the actor, Gabriel Spencer, which brought Ben to the Middlesex Sessions and nearly to the gallows; through bitter quarrels with fellow-dramatists and with Inigo Jones, the architect, his rival for Court favour as an organizer of masques; quarrels with his audiences which damned *Sejanus*; and finally, when he was in poverty and decay, but defiant to the last, even with the actors, the King's servants who "never acted, but most negligently play'd" his comedy, *The New Inn*, in 1629, as he complained on the very title-page of the printed play, in 1631. But he inspired the greatest respect for himself as dramatist, as scholar and wit, and, not least, as man, from royalty downwards; and he occupied a unique position as literary dictator and centre of literary society comparable only to those of Dryden, and of his namesake Samuel Johnson in later generations. Half his plays, he tells us, were never printed, and he made out of all of them under two hundred pounds. His living was made mainly out of Court and city patronage, partly from masques, which he supplied in the finest series in the history of that Court entertainment from 1605 to 1612, and partly from gifts and pensions. Something of the independence, the virility, and the harshness of the man runs through his plays.

As a dramatist he is, nevertheless, extraordinarily versatile. *Every Man in his Humour* combines vivid satirical realism in characterization with a plot that goes with a swing, and few readers are likely to forget Stephen, who "is mightily given to melancholy," and having requested and obtained "a stool to be melan-

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choly upon," asks "Cousin, is it well? Am I melancholy enough?" *The Silent Woman* is a wild farce, admirably constructed, in which the crescendo of noise that assails Morose, the lover of silence who marries a boy pretending to be a dumb woman, assumes epic proportions and comes to a crisis in a gale of laughter. In *Volpone* vulturous rascality is shown in heroic stature among a crew of meaner birds of prey. These, with *The Alchemist*, are masterpieces of a satirist, a wit, and a poet with a sense of the theatre and of plot and action. *Sejanus* lifts satire into lofty poetry, equal as drama and as scholarship, though in the companion play upon Roman history, *Catiline*, Jonson's reading almost smothers his dramatic talent. The uproarious Aristophanic satire and burlesque of *The Poetaster*, in which Jonson pillories the dramatists Marston and Dekker, is an extraordinary contrast to *The Sad Shepherd*, a pastoral of Robin Hood, Maid Marian, Puck, shepherds and shepherdesses :

" Born with the primrose, or the violets,
Or earliest roses blown."

And not only in his many exquisite lyrics, but throughout the masques, we find an inexhaustible fount of fancy, of imagery, of invention, of tenderness, as well as of intellectual robustness, and occasional epic power, as in *The Speeches at Prince Henry's Barriers*. No better advice can be given than the poet's own advice "To the Reader": "Fare thee well, and fall to. Read. BEN JONSON."

George Chapman (1560-1634) was born near Hitchin, of an earlier generation, the generation of the Univer-

sity wits. But as a dramatist his career does not begin until 1596, though it continues until 1613, when he collaborated with Shirley, one of the Caroline school, in *Chabot, Admiral of France*. Chapman was a distinguished poet who moulded into some strange verse the philosophical interests of an advanced group with which Marlowe and Sir Walter Raleigh were associated. In 1598 he printed a remarkable continuation of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, and in subsequent years he laboured on his splendid verse translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, finishing a complete "Homer" by 1616. His dramatic work is strangely unequal in quality, and puzzling in its nature. On the one hand *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596) is a chaotic romantic comedy of disguise; on the other *All Fools* (1604) is a highly developed comedy of humours. There is a similar contrast between *The Gentleman Usher* (1602) and *Monsieur D'Olive* (1604). *Bussy D'Ambois* (1604) and *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (1610), his most popular plays, are romantic, indeed almost hectic, tragedies from French history. Yet *Charles, Duke of Byron* (1608), in two parts, on similar themes, is more severe and chastened. And *Cæsar and Pompey* (1613), in an apparent attempt at scholarliness, lacks all the fire and eloquence of his melodramas. As a final oddity, we find him in 1601 writing a lost comedy on a topical and somewhat sordid story of London life, in *The Old Joiner of Aldgate*. It might appear that the general uncertainty of Chapman's work is partly due to a conflict between the middle-aged classical scholar, the dramatist with ideals resembling those of Ben Jonson, and the needy man of letters whose fortunes

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were insecure, in spite of his "Homer," in spite of the patronage of Prince Henry, until late in his long life. He must have had a considerable market value as a playwright, in any case, for he got over thirteen pounds for *The Old Joiner*.

Chapman wrote mostly for boy companies, but does not seem to have been attached to any one company, an independent freelance like Dekker. Another notable Elizabethan dramatist, Marston, with whom Chapman was once associated, in *Eastward Hol*, and who also wrote mainly for the children's companies, is not mentioned by Meres, for, in 1599, Marston is spoken of by Henslowe as "Mr. Maxton the new poet." We now come to a group of dramatists who, though they are contemporary with Shakespeare and the greater part of their work falls within his life, yet are of a later generation. The greatest of them are Marston, Middleton, and Webster.

John Marston (1575-1634), the son of a Coventry lawyer, was an Oxford graduate and student of the Middle Temple who took to literature, first as the erotic and satiric poet of *Pygmalion's Image* and *The Scourge of Villainy* (1598), then as a dramatist. He began in collaboration with Jonson, Dekker, and Chettle, for Henslowe, but soon found a steady market with the Children of Paul's and, later on, with the Children of the Queen's Revels at the Blackfriars, whose popularity, touched on in *Hamlet*, was due in part to the excellent plays furnished by Marston and Chapman.

Marston was in serious trouble, together with Jonson and Chapman, over their play *Eastward Ho!* (1605), with the Privy Council, and in 1608 he was again a

delinquent, this time being sent to Newgate Prison. Thereafter he left the theatre, both as financial sharer in the Queen's Revels company and as dramatist. He married the daughter of one of the King's chaplains, went into the Church himself, and died in London, after holding a Hampshire vicarage for some years. We need not take seriously Jonson's famous jibe, that "Marston wrote his father-in-law's preachings, and his father-in-law his comedies."

It is also a question how far we should take seriously the notorious stage-war of 1600-1601, in which various dramatists pilloried each other on their respective stages, a war in which Jonson and Marston, with Dekker, were the principal combatants. The main engagements were in *Histriomastix*, as revised by Marston, *Jack Drum's Entertainment* and *What You Will* by Marston, *Satiromastix* by Dekker and Marston, on the one side, and *Cynthia's Revels* and *The Poetaster* in reply by Jonson, who made great play with Marston's red hair, his "little legs," and his inflated rhetoric. At any rate, Marston and Jonson were friends and even collaborators in the very same year, and we may feel that a "flyting" of this kind, the rougher the better, would be good business for the theatres concerned.

Jonson hits upon the characteristic poetic defect of Marston, who has certainly great moments, but in tragedy they are drowned in the general exaggeration of language, character, and plot, in his first, *Antonio and Mellida* (1599) as in his last, *The Insatiate Countess* (1613). The tragedy of passion, on modern themes of Italian origin, here topples over into sensa-

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tional melodrama, outdoing *The Spanish Tragedy* by multiplying its effects and aggrandizing its passions into inflation, as in the tumid, ghost-haunted *Antonio's Revenge*. In *The Malcontent* (1604), however, a magnificent picture of the melancholy of bitter ironic humour, in the person of the returned Duke, reflects Marston's own satiric mood, and the play has undoubted power and dramatic effectiveness. But Marston is at his best in lighter comedies, after all, whether in *The Dutch Courtezan* (1603) and *The Fawn* (1604), or in *Eastward Ho!*, in which he had a considerable share. He deserves no small fame for producing, in his short career as a dramatist, a play of power *The Malcontent*, and a play of delight, *The Dutch Courtezan*. John Day (1574-1640), a University man, once of Caius College, Cambridge, preceded Marston in his labours for Henslowe, which began in 1598. The University "Parnassus" plays have been attributed to him; most of his known work is less unusual. He collaborated with others in *The Travels of Three English Brothers* (1607) for citizen consumption. He suggested topical political satire in *The Isle of Gulls* (1606) acted by the Children of the Revels, for whom he wrote most of his comedies, after he got free of Henslowe. His *Parliament of Bees*, the only known work of the later years of his long life, was a poetic allegory and not a play. Perhaps *Humour out of Breath* (1607) shows Day at his best, along with *The Isle of Gulls*, with a gift for neat construction, adequate verse, and epigrammatic prose that sends us back to Lyly for a prototype. He could be crisp in verse too, as in his comment upon Henslowe, who builds

“out of the bones of foundered players;
They feed on Poets’ brains, he eats their breath.”

Thomas Middleton (1570-1627) was a Londoner and probably a Gray’s Inn man, who had a long and fruitful career as a dramatist, working in turn for Henslowe and the Admiral’s Men, for the Paul’s company, and for Prince Charles’s Men in the reign of James I. He also devised pageants for the City, and in 1620 was made Chronologer to the City with a salary which Ben Jonson enjoyed after the death of this “base fellow,” as Ben censured him in conversation with Drummond, for no clear reason. Middleton certainly went to prison, on account of reflections upon Spain contained in his play, *The Game at Chess*, but this was in 1624. Ben was probably referring to his literary standing. Middleton certainly ought to go along with Dekker and Heywood in his freedom from critical theories concerning the drama. Like them, he was a hack-writer of genius, unequally displayed in numerous plays, many written in collaboration, and all written to sell and to be acted. Middleton can be dull, as in his topical satirical comedy, *The Family of Love* (1604). But it is rare with him. And a series of witty, amusing, lively comedies of humour and of intrigue runs from *Blurt, Master Constable* (1601), *A Mad World, my Masters* (1604), to *No Wit, no Help like a Woman’s* (1613), all masterpieces of their kind. A graver note enters into his later plays, mostly tragedies or tragicomedies. In tragedy *Women Beware Women* is beyond question his masterpiece, to be linked up in his work on an equality with that drama of higher

flight and poetic power, but more unequal, in which Middleton collaborated with William Rowley, *The Changeling*, with its amazing pair of characters, Beatrice and her hated, remorseless lover De Flores. No one, however, can read Middleton and Marston without feeling that the very air is darkening around the drama, and that its substance is becoming unwholesome. There is an undercurrent of accepted immorality, true and clean romance is fading, and the artificial and conventional code of social honour is replacing it, as in that powerful and excellent play of Middleton and Rowley, *A Fair Quarrel* (1616). The drama has begun to move in the world of gallantry in his later work, in most marked contrast with that cheerful and hearty citizen comedy, *The Roaring Girl*, or the tragi-comedy of domestic life, *The Honest Whore*, both written in collaboration with Dekker. One can hardly doubt that, while the changing times had their influence, so also had his respective collaborators, Dekker and Rowley, in the character of Middleton's work. William Rowley was a sharer with Heywood in Queen Anne's company at the Red Bull, and died a member of the King's company in 1626. While his comedies show little individuality and vary in style and quality, his tragedy *All's Lost by Lust* shows poetic strength and a disillusioned view of life and passion, which suggest that he was perhaps the greater poet of the two when Middleton and he worked together.

The same darker tone runs through the work of that tragic genius, John Webster, another dramatist who wrote mostly in collaboration, with Dekker, Marston,

and Rowley, who is first mentioned as writing for Henslowe in 1602, and who died in 1632. But his fame rests on two great tragedies, *The White Devil* (1611) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613), which he wrote unaided. *The White Devil* is a sensational drama of sinister Italian crime, intrigue, and vengeance, dominated among many powerful characters by the brilliant Vittoria and the enigmatic unprincipled Flamineo. In *The Duchess of Malfi* the relentless persecution of the Duchess is the tragic theme, in which all the resources of terror and pathos are exploited to unequalled effect and bring the play to conclusions of sheer despair, lightened only by occasional splendours of dramatic poetry. The lapse into sensation and into unrelieved horror in a gloomy world is shown in an extreme form in the monstrous tragedies of Cyril Tourneur, *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1607-1610), in which sanity and realism are lost in the extravagance of passion and sensation, though the spark of poetry remains kindled in them.

CHAPTER V

SHAKESPEARE'S SUCCESSORS

IF the years 1590-1610 were dominated by Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, the two following decades were certainly dominated by John Fletcher (1579-1625). We now come to a group of dramatists whose work lies mainly beyond the period of Shakespeare's activity,

even if not beyond that of his life in one instance. For Francis Beaumont (1584-1616), the sharer with Fletcher in a famous partnership, died in the year of Shakespeare's death, though he was the younger man by twenty years. And with the prominence of the new group of dramatists it is easy to observe the influence of their two greatest predecessors. Fletcher, Massinger, Ford, and Shirley are developing the romantic drama on the basis of what they had learned of the Elizabethans, notably of Shakespeare. On the other hand, the group of young men who sat at the feet of Ben Jonson and called themselves the "Sons of Ben" continued his "Comedy of Humours" with realistic and satirical intent. Among these the chief were Nathan Field and Richard Brome. The span of life of Brome leads us into the Commonwealth, and that of Shirley into the Restoration. So that the later developments of the Elizabethan drama are closely linked up with the earlier. We shall see that they also in their turn prepare the way for the Restoration drama.

It is essential, moreover, to realize the ever-increasing importance of the Court and of the King's company and its theatres. The vast majority of the best plays written during these later decades were written for the King's Men. And it seems clear that the drama written for them had a more definitely literary purpose, and made higher claims, than that written for the more popular theatres, such as the Red Bull in Clerkenwell. With this literary quality, so encouraged by Court patronage and by developing critical spirit, went other concomitants. The drama began to represent more and more the characteristics of the Court

circle and the narrow field of English society surrounding the Court in London. So we come more and more into touch with a social, moral, and spiritual content which differs widely from that of Shakespeare's plays. Gallants and ladies, with their ways of thinking, take the place of those men and women who, in Shakespeare, not only are individuals but also stand for humanity in general. Fletcher excelled in the portraiture of fine gentlemen, said Dryden, claiming for him a gift that Shakespeare was not thought to possess. It was true that Fletcher's heroes are closer studies of the Court gallant under James and Charles than are any of Shakespeare's of the gallant of his day. But Shakespeare was not concerned to reproduce the tone, the spirit, and wit of the town. He could give high comedy and the dialogue suitable to it when he wished, as in *Love's Labour's Lost* or in *Much Ado about Nothing*. But Fletcher can scarcely vary his tone, and his Romans, like his *Island Princess*, speak fundamentally the same language.

Political ideas betray the same dependence upon the times and circumstances. The notion that the king can do no wrong, that his person is sacred, and that loyalty to this divine being is paramount to all other moral obligations, runs through the drama of this Stuart age, corrupting its motives and lending unreality to its plots. So in *The Maid's Tragedy*, the most famous of the plays written by Beaumont and Fletcher in collaboration, Amintor, husband of the heroine Evadne, is resigned to any disgrace at the hands of a king. The plot is offensive for this and for other reasons.

But many of the plots are offensive. In general, the

dramatists seem to find that the tragic possibilities of normal life have been exhausted, and the tragedy of the morbid and the sensational remains for exploitation. So a second play, equally famous in its day, *A King and no King*, has for its theme supposedly incestuous love, and later on Massinger's *The Unnatural Combat* and Ford's *'Tis Pity she's a Whore* deal with the contemplated or actual crime. So also in comedy and tragi-comedy the novelty, the surprise, and the complexity of the plot assume more importance than the treatment of character and of emotion, which tend to fall into conventional lines. The influence of Spanish drama and the Spanish novel accentuated this tendency, an influence which was due partly to the search for new material, partly to the change in foreign policy which led England into alliance with Spain, the implacable enemy of Elizabethan England. Thus, while Pharamond, the Spanish prince in *Philaster*, one of the early masterpieces of Beaumont and Fletcher, serves as a vicious and weak contrast to the virtues of the Sicilian hero Philaster, in later days the whole cast of characters may be Spanish and the action may be placed throughout in Spain, as in Fletcher's excellent comedy of intrigue, *The Spanish Curate*.

In the comedy of intrigue, indeed, lies Fletcher's natural excellence, and this type of play was principally practised by Fletcher when he came to write alone. Of these *The Chances*, *The Wild-Goose Chase*, and *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* are among the best, with *The Spanish Curate* and *The Humorous Lieutenant* not far behind. Fletcher can write tragedy alone, as is evidenced by *Bonduca* and *Valentinian*. *Valentinian*,

indeed, is one of Fletcher's chief claims to fame, though nowhere are there clearer signs of the disuniting effects of excess of incident and complexity of plot. The play furnishes, incidentally, proof of the admirable lyric gifts of Fletcher in its many songs, gifts which gave beauty to his one pastoral, *The Faithful Shepherdess*. And it has one unforgettable line. Valentinian, Emperor of Rome, seeks to seduce Lucina, wife of Maximus, who is in his palace and at his mercy. To her appeal to justice he answers terribly;

“Justice shall never hear you; *I am justice!*”

But such things are rare among the many comedies of lively action and conversation, with endless surprises and reversals of situation to reawaken interest and curiosity. Such a title as *A Wife for a Month* suggests the importance of curiosity in his hold upon his audiences, as compared with Shakespeare's tranquil *As You Like It* or *A Winter's Tale*.

So also the romantic comedy in Fletcher depends more upon situation and setting, upon the unusual in life, than upon a romantic view of life which idealizes and lends deeper significance to life, though *Philaster* comes near to this latter transmutation by force of beauty. *The Island Princess*, with its promising title, leads us into no Utopia after all, and merely transports ladies and gallants to the Dutch East Indies, unchanged in spirit. And when Fletcher rehandled the story of Cleopatra, in *The False One*, accepted as one of his masterpieces, he took for theme her early amour with Cæsar. We have a skilful plot; adequate, indeed excellent, rhetoric; a conflict between the calls of love

and those of empire; but the romantic splendour of passion, all-sufficing in Shakespeare for tragic purposes, is no longer there.

The difficulty of characterizing individual dramatists is nowhere greater than in dealing with the large group of plays contained in the folio collections of plays printed under the names of Beaumont and Fletcher in 1647 and in 1679, which contain thirty-four and fifty-two plays respectively. For many of these plays are known to have been written in collaboration by Fletcher with Beaumont, by Fletcher with Shakespeare (*The Two Noble Kinsmen*), or by Fletcher with Massinger. And some are reasonably believed to have been the work of other combinations of two or even more dramatists. Various attempts to settle these problems of authorship and to divide the plays up between their authors fail to satisfy the critical reason. There is the same inevitable question concerning many of the plays of Massinger, Ford, and Shirley in this later generation of dramatists as in earlier periods, and it is rare to have such certainty of sole authorship as is given by the surviving manuscript in the British Museum of *Believe as you List* in Massinger's own handwriting.

Philip Massinger (1583-1640) was born at Salisbury, educated at Oxford, and enjoyed the patronage of the family of the Earl of Pembroke, his father's employer. His principal source of livelihood was the stage, not as actor, but as dramatist only. He was collaborating for Henslowe in 1613 with Fletcher, Daborne, and Field, and in 1615 was indebted to Henslowe for £3, but probably began his career some years earlier. After a

decade at least of collaboration he seems to have struck out independently in a series of notable plays of his own. Massinger was perhaps, with Ben Jonson, the dramatist who was most concerned with the literary aspects of his art. An interesting series of printed single plays by Massinger exists which have the poet's own corrections of the text in the margin, and were evidently prepared for and presented to literary patrons. It appears, moreover, that he undertook to oversee the publishing of his plays himself, dedicating them with prefaces to various patrons. Similar signed dedications accompany Ford's plays, replacing the older fashion of poet's or printer's preface to the reader. Massinger's work shows how much he was influenced by his predecessors, notably by Shakespeare, whose plays had been collected and printed in a folio edition in 1623, about the time when Massinger began to write independently. And he was distinctly a scholarly man. He calls his plays "humble studies," and they were, in fact, the fruit of what we should now call research as well as thought and imagination. If he was partly dependent upon patronage, he maintained his intellectual independence, both in the frequent comments upon the politics of his day in his plays, and in his sturdy Catholicism, which is plainly visible in his early *Virgin Martyr*, written in collaboration with Dekker, and in the later *The Renegado*, in which the Jesuit Francisco plays a laudable part among Moors and Christians in Tunis. It is natural, therefore, to find Massinger maintaining the dignity of his art, and making claims for the stage against criticism which would deprive it of its independence, as in the

person of Paris, the hero of *The Roman Actor*, one of his finest plays, which he himself "even held the most perfect birth of my Minerva."

"Or when we show a judge that is corrupt,
And will give up his sentence, as he favours
The person, not the cause; saving the guilty,
If of his faction, and as oft condemning
The innocent, out of particular spleen;
If any in this reverend assembly,
Nay, even yourself, my lord, that are the image
Of absent Cæsar, feel something in your bosom,
That puts you in remembrance of things past,
Or things intended,—'tis not in us to help it.
I have said, my lord; and now as you find cause,
Or censure us, or free us with applause."

(Act I., Sc. iii.)

This is the spirit of the man, a serious poet of strength, industry, and constructive ability. But he is less independent in the actual pursuit of the drama, and falls in with current taste in many ways, especially in his efforts to rival the comic power and liveliness of a Fletcher, or the satirical and humorous realism of Jonson, for neither of which his natural gifts fitted him. In general, his attempts at comic relief in tragedy are deplorable and unpleasant, and rival the most unsavoury passages of an unsavoury age. But he was notably successful in one comedy, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, and to a hardly less degree in *The City-Madam*, in which the influence of Jonson and Middleton is perceptible. In the former Sir Giles Overreach is a powerful full-length portrait of an ambitious and unscrupulous usurer, and his daughter Margaret the most agreeable of Massinger's women. In the latter

the conclusion and moral is characteristic of the changed times, bidding

“ Our city dames, whom wealth makes proud, to move
In their own spheres; and willingly to confess,
In their habits, manners, and their highest port,
A distance 'twixt the city and the court.”

The romantic tragi-comedy or tragedy is the staple, however, of Massinger's drama, in which his rhetorical, loose, and somewhat laboured verse matches characters, motives, and incidents that are heightened beyond the normal of human nature. There is a certain sameness in this rhetorical dialogue as in the material of his plots and his characters, in the eternal conflict of true love and false lust, honour and dishonour, corruption and honesty. The theme of love tends to assume such proportions that the artificial world of these plays seems to turn solely upon these matters, to which others are subordinated. And Massinger's women (apart from his colourless heroines, even Camiola in *The Maid of Honour* or Lidia in *The Great Duke of Florence*) are mostly bold, immodest, unrestrained, and unscrupulous, following one pattern. So the Empress Domitia in *The Roman Actor* has little to distinguish her from Corisca in *The Bondman*, or others who, in Massinger as in Beaumont and Fletcher, illustrate the degradation of woman upon the stage and the satiety of audiences weary of simpler and truer pictures of life. Yet, with all this, the general level of excellence in Massinger's plays stands high, and there is proof of his adequacy and power in such dramas as *The Duke of Milan*, *The Roman Actor*, or *The Maid of Honour*, to

name three of the best. His success on the stage was great, and the principal tragic actor of the King's company after Burbage retired, the equally famous Joseph Taylor, who created most of Massinger's heroes, was even moved to celebrate the dramatist in verse. A tribute from Ford, his fellow-dramatist, commends the "weight and truth" of his plays "in this besotted age," and Ford had some right to judge.

John Ford (1586-1639) was a Devonshire man of gentle birth, who took to legal studies in 1602 and never, apparently, deserted his profession, if we may believe his own statements. For Ford was the first notable dramatist to insist that his plays were the products of his leisure hours, and to desire men to distinguish him from the professional playwrights, an affectation which is so strong among Restoration dramatists. This was surely an affectation with Ford, for he was collaborating with Dekker in *The Witch of Edmonton* about 1621, and in *Keep the Widow Waking*, with Dekker, Webster, and Rowley, in 1624. But the pose points still more clearly to the growing literary conception of the drama. And Ford's chief work was done alone from *The Lover's Melancholy* in 1628 onwards. The tendencies that we find in Beaumont and Fletcher, and developed in Massinger, came to their highest pitch in Ford. It is hardly too much to say that the real tragic power of Ford is devoted to themes of sensational morality and to theatrical effect. The theme of incestuous love, touched upon by Fletcher, the core of Massinger's *The Unnatural Combat*, is the principal motive in two of Ford's plays, *The Broken Heart* and its successor *'Tis Pity She's a*

Whore. In the former the problem is evaded by confusions of birth, but in the latter it is carried out to a tragic end, and is set up as a legitimate theme for tragedy. In vain does Massinger write at the end of *The Unnatural Combat*:

“There cannot be a want of power above
To punish murder and unlawful love.”

Ford here bends his great poetic powers to justify imaginatively against conventional morality the claims of overmastering passion, and allows his Annabella to leave this world, crushed by human justice and resentment, and slain by her lover and brother Giovanni,

“to fill a throne
Of innocence and sanctity in heaven,”

where Giovanni trusts to

“enjoy the grace
Freely to view my Annabella’s face.”

The problem-play, so handled by Ford, illustrates, moreover, the poet’s interest in the workings of the human mind under stress. The psychological curiosity of the Elizabethans, which gives subtlety and strength to their characterization, which was one of the bases of Ben Jonson’s “Comedy of Humours,” is pursued by Ford into darker recesses. He follows Burton in his inquiries, in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, and was, indeed, known to his contemporaries as a student of melancholy, the result of the war between human passion and appetite, and the restraints of fate, morality, and society. *The Lover’s Melancholy* is in part, in fact, a dramatic commentary upon Burton and

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draws material from him. Allowing for this unhealthy bias, none has portrayed men and women with greater insight and vividness than Ford. Linked with this moral sensationalism went in Ford a full measure of the older sensationalism of violence, murder, and surprise, and nothing in the older drama exceeds the horrors of *'Tis Pity*, when Giovanni enters with the murdered Annabella's heart upon the dagger with which he proceeds to kill her husband Soranzo. Ford was a student of Shakespeare, but he departed widely from one of the lessons of Shakespeare's example, the due limitations of the tragic as of the comic art. The sanity of the one, and the fresh heartiness of the other, were out of Ford's element, as they were alien to the spirit of the society for which he wrote. In one instance Ford followed more closely on the model of the master, in his surprising revival of the chronicle history, *Perkin Warbeck*, an almost deliberate piece of archaism and of dignified restraint both in its tragic and its comic persons. But the changed intellectual atmosphere of the time is clearly revealed in the convention of royalty expressed by the Scottish King James:

"He must be more than subject who can utter
The language of a king, and such is thine,"

and in the heroic quality of Warbeck, who shares the sympathy of the audience with Antiochus, the hero of a play on a similar theme by Massinger, *Believe as You List*.

The romantic legacies of Shakespeare and Fletcher, it has been seen, determine in the main the work of their successors. But the two realistic comedies of

Massinger stood by no means alone. The influence of Ben Jonson and of Middleton spread to a group of lesser men. Nathan Field, famous as a child actor from 1600 to 1613, was Ben Jonson's "scholar," and was also claimed by Chapman as his "son," before he came of age to set up as dramatist as well as adult actor, in collaboration, as with Fletcher or Massinger. *A Woman is a Weathercock* and *Amends for Ladies*, while the romantic strain is there, are clearly aimed at studying humours of life and character, and the former shows that Field had learnt to complicate his plot and to knit it firmly together in a workmanlike play. Richard Brome was a close intimate of Ben Jonson, was, indeed, "his man Mr. Brome," his assistant and apprentice, educated and trained by him. On one occasion Brome collaborated in a play with Ben Jonson's own son, "young Jonson." When he came to write independently, he followed his master as far as his powers went in the majority of his fifteen known plays. But Dekker also wrote verses in praise of his work to "my son Brome." And the lighter gaiety of Dekker, and his sympathy for a simpler romantic view of life, may be found even in Brome's vivid realistic comedies of town life, like *The Sparagus Garden*, *The Antipodes*, or *The City Wit*, as well as in other plays of a different type. The romantic drama of intrigue, as in *The Love-sick Court*, shows Brome following afar off in the footsteps of Shakespeare and Fletcher. But he could be original, too, and *A Jovial Crew* or *The Merry Beggars*, his last play (1641), was definitely a criticism of the current heroic sentimentalism of the age and of the literary drama that held the

stage. This romantic comedy brought the country and nature back to the drama without conventionalizing them, for Brome's crew of vagabonds is as coarsely realistic as anything Jonson or Brome ever wrote. And it is pleasant to think of this play coming at the very end of the Elizabethan drama to reassert the sanity and naturalness of the greatest days of that drama in the midst of a society buried in conventions.

The same critical superiority to the general taste of the Court audience is to be found, along with remarkable versatility, in the last of the great Elizabethans, Shirley, who is worthy to rank with all but the greatest. James Shirley (1596-1666) was a Londoner, a pupil of Merchant Taylors' School, and subsequently of both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Reversing the career of Marston, Shirley took Orders first, but, having turned Roman Catholic, left the Church and set up as a dramatist in 1625. He visited Ireland in order to write plays for Ogilby's new theatre in Dublin, from 1635 to 1640. When the Civil War broke out, Shirley, along with a number of actors, joined the Royal armies under one of his patrons, the Duke of Newcastle, who also wrote plays. During and after the Commonwealth, Shirley lived the life of the literary man dependent partly on patronage and partly on schoolmastering in London. His life thus bridged the Elizabethan and the Restoration ages, and he was the only true Elizabethan who survived to see his plays acted on the Restoration stage. Shirley's plays resume, in some sort, all the tendencies of the seventeenth-century drama up to the closing of the theatres by the Long Parliament in 1642.

“Whether the comic muse, or ladies’ love,
Romance, or direful tragedy.”

Shirley practises all these varieties of the drama with former or contemporary models before him. None of the later dramatists betrays more clearly his studies in his predecessors, and Shakespeare is echoed in situation, as in *The Gamester*, which repeats Helena’s device in *All’s Well that Ends Well*, or in phrase, as in Cornari’s line in *The Gentleman of Venice*—

“A little blood will wash away this deed.”

But Shirley never falls into tragical extravagances, or into the extremes of sentimental heroic romance. And he is capable of a satirical realism that is refreshing, in *The Example*, in which Sir Solitary Plot is “infected with a serious folly,” and studies “plots, nothing but plots,” eternally suspicious. The prologue to this play is equally Jonsonian in its tone and attitude. Shirley’s mirth can be no less refreshing. It is varied in its material, and on occasion, as in Roberto in *The Gentleman of Venice*, can be hearty and clean. His greatest tragedy, *The Cardinal*, recalls *The Duchess of Malfi* in its main theme and is not unworthy of the comparison. Shirley’s invariable competence and adequacy never rise to the heart-shaking power of the highest tragedy, but there is something of the old lightning of rhetoric in such a line as that of the Duchess when, horror-stricken by the last revelation of the Cardinal’s infamy, she cries out:

“How came you by that cloven foot?”

Shirley is critical of rhetoric, too, and Angelina in *The Sisters* pours pretty scorn on the prevalent imagery of popular French and English heroic romance.

Shirley thus stands as the last of the Elizabethans with claims to real greatness, within his limitations, and few of his plays, of which nearly forty survive, are ineffective as drama or as poetry. He also points clearly to the drama of the next age. The comedy of manners and of intrigue, with a disillusioned tone of cynicism, representing with somewhat painful truth the life and conversation of gallants and wits devoid of higher ideals, may be studied almost as well in the first act of *The Gamester* as in the Restoration comedy. And the titles of certain of his plays suggest how far the Town was become the scene and the subject of the comic stage, and how close the last Elizabethan was to the new Restoration drama. *Hyde Park*, *The Ball*, *The Coronation*, *Love in a Maze*, may serve as examples, and *The School of Compliment* points even further forward.

To compare Shirley with the remaining dramatists of these last decades of the age is to emphasize his superiority. The plays of Nabbes, Davenport, Marmion, or Suckling are of little importance in themselves. But they give valuable information concerning the trend of the drama. They suggest, for example, that the powerful and continued inspiration of literature through the stage has waned and that no great literature was lost by the closing of the theatres. We see in them, again, how the literary acceptance of the drama has led to the intrusion of the amateur poet and wit into the field wherein the great leaders were professional

dramatists and the greatest of all had been apprenticed to the boards and there learned much of their art. Thomas Nabbes, to take a respectable figure, was the clerkly servant of some Worcestershire nobleman. His first play, *Covent Garden* (1632), was dedicated to Sir John Suckling, the author of a tragi-comedy *Aglaura*, and of some admirable verse, a shining example of the "wit" to which Nabbes aspired. "For the stile, 'tis humble," writes Nabbes, and in the Prologue and Epilogue he sets forth his ideals. He has eschewed the imitation of the great ones of the past, his plot is original and composed by himself, the play is a hasty production, he is reasonably content with its "partial acceptance" on the stage, and he disclaims any attempt at height of style. But he claims unity of time as a classical excellence. The stage directions and the general conduct of the play betray the hand, not of a prentice, but of the student who is neither craftsman nor genius. The dramatist, to quote Nabbes, "sure hath had very mannerly breeding; he came not from the Bankside." And his "mannerly breeding" extends to his morals. It is clear that the outrageous ugliness of much of the late Jacobean and early Caroline drama is disappearing, that it was the product of a corruption at Court which was discouraged by the finer taste and the moral purity of Charles I., and that it was never a true reflex of the mind of English men and women in general.

Robert Davenport, on the other hand, was among the journeymen of the stage, and held different views on most points. He held, in the words of Lorenzo in *The City Night-Cap*, concerning plots in "our Italian comedies":

“let him seek new ones (who)
Cannot make old ones better.”

In this play he adapts a scene from *Pericles*, and in *King John and Matilda* we have a historical romantic tragedy in a new revision of Munday's play.

Last of all comes William Davenant, though his dramatic career began as early as 1626. For Davenant survived the Commonwealth and continued his connection with the stage at the Restoration both as author and manager. Indeed, he was responsible for the revival of the theatre before the end of the interregnum. He may stand, therefore, as the symbol of the continuity of the Elizabethan drama, in its later phases, with the Restoration drama. It has already been pointed out that the artificial and immoral comedy of manners and of the Town had grown out of the example of Jonson and Middleton in Fletcher and his followers. And the heroic tragedy of the Restoration may fitly be referred back for its beginnings to the plays of Davenant along with others, like Carlell, who exploited the extravagant sentiment, the point of honour, the unreal problems, and the rhetorical idealism of the heroic romance which the tastes of Queen Henriette Maria, fed on French novels, brought into high fashion in England, a fashion which continued under Charles II. Davenant's *Love and Honour* might serve as the general title of most of such plays.

So in the end, in the history of the drama as in all matters of human life, we arrive at the close of one great phase only to find that we are already embarked on the next phase, linked indissolubly with the first

by chains of generation and descent, as the first in its turn had arisen out of an earlier phase. So that the drama, which is a representation of the life and the interests of a people seeking the entertainment of the imagination, flows in one stream, unbroken though interrupted, from the Miracle Plays of Medieval England to Shakespeare, Jonson, and Fletcher, on to the comedy of Wycherley and Congreve and the tragedy of Dryden, and thence to what we may see upon the London stage to-day.

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